



# BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

News from our Airport at Biggin Hill - established 2005



CLUB AND AIRPORT NEWS

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## CAPITAINE HADDOCK, ESQ

The story begins here, February 1976 at Tarbes (Oussun Lourdes) in the early morning sunshine at the foot of the Haute Pyrenees.



The Libyan military having purchased 5 Rallye aircraft for their training school at Tobruk. This consisted of 4 X 180HP and one 150HP Rallye aircraft. My friend Jean Auffrey was the co-ordinator and leader of this expedition. Jean elected to fly the slower 150 Rallye and I would fly in formation with him he also elected to fly direct to Ajaccio which was 396 nm. The other 3 French pilots preferred to follow the French coast rather than risk a sea crossing (only 271nm). However I questioned Jean's intention to fly direct as his aircraft was slower and should we encounter a headwind it could be a disadvantage. He was confident he had sufficient endurance so we departed en massé. Leaving the French coast we encountered some cloud for the next hour before exiting into blue skies ahead. Although the flight progressed normally we did appear to be running late and we had no reference to our ground and we had most certainly passed our PNR. During this time I was able to observe Jean changing fuel tanks balancing his fuel until he had to select his final tank, I knew this

because as his previous tank ran dry and he lost power I shot past him. We were now flying along the Corsican coast with not too long to run. – I asked him if he was going to make it, he responded, “not too sure” he would get to within 12 miles of Ajaccio and he decided it may be safer to land now, because Ajaccio is around the corner and up an inlet, with cliffs down to the sea, not a safe environment for a forced landing as he had good place in sight. I stayed with him until he landed and was safe. He told me everything was fine and I should continue to Ajaccio. Arriving at Ajaccio I proceeded directly to the ‘Hotel Vecchio’ where we had 5 rooms booked for the night, I would be the only arrival. Established in the hotel, I was soon contacted by Jean, whereupon I offered to take some fuel to him as he was only 12 miles away at a place called Cargése, and he advised me to stay put because he had landed at the very place where he had spent his honeymoon and was having a celebration drink with some old friends. Realising the other three French pilots had only got as far as Marseille because they thought the weather was worse than it was and decided to stop. One had cautiously put down in Perpignan before continuing to Marseille.

The next day I set off to Cargése with 25 litres of Avgas along the winding coastal road. I was greeted by a crowd of locals, police and other spectators, all eager to help us out of this predicament. The beach was too soft for take-off,

so a friendly farmer came with a tractor which had a blade on the front and duly graded a perfectly hard strip for Jean.



I headed back to Ajaccio to try and find out where the other ferry pilots were and their estimate. We seem to have got away with this incident without any formal interference from the authorities, nor did we report back to Socata, Paris.

The other three pilots arrived at Ajaccio unaware of the Cargése incident. We had prepared their flight plans and arranged their fuel on arrival and departed for Tunisia, as we were almost a day behind schedule. Tunisia was a simple turn around and we headed for Tripoli, arriving late afternoon. Protocol dictated our departure for Benghazi the next day which meant it was dark by the time we arrived. We were all escorted to a large house which was repudiatedly occupied by the exiled King Faruk of Egypt, for a period of time. It was a very large timber house, which had within a very large folder, at least 9 inches thick which appeared to contain all the original, detailed, blueprint drawings of Entebbe Airport...?? (Very strange, the ‘Raid on Entebbe’ happened on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1976...!!!) One wonders, of the significance of these technical drawings at this place, at this time – how close can

one be, to stumbling on something like this ?

The next morning we all departed for Tobruk, our final destination. Having delivered the aircraft safely and following the formalities, we were left wondering how to get back to Benghazi, a.s.a.p.



A French colleague appeared with a Seneca 1 and offered us a lift. He had another pilot with him – we were 5 plus baggage – we were all a bit thinner in those days and he was confident we could manage if the CoG was balanced carefully. With the temperature at 25C the aircraft performed remarkably well with 7 pilots plus baggage etc.

Arriving back at the offices of SOCAT, Paris, I am greeted by all unanimous chorus as I entered the offices of Aerospatiale. ‘Ah..! *Capitaine Haddock*’. The force landing had been fully reported in the Corsican press and my appearance at Cargésé hadn’t gone unnoticed when I appeared the morning after, on the beach.



Quote: ‘*Peu apre 10 h, hier donc le pilote de la SOCAT assisté á terre d’un collègue Australien ressemblent au Capitaine Haddock*’. From the French comic strip *Tin, Tin*

### THE GOODYEAR AIRSHIP

The afternoon of 9<sup>th</sup> July 1972 saw the arrival of the Goodyear Airship ‘Europa’ as it arrived at Biggin Hill greeted by some airfield gentry of yesteryear.



(note trees beneath airship.)

Within minutes of touchdown the editor elbowed his way aboard and enjoyed a 50 flight over London. It is 37 years since the arrival of the airship and the view across the airfield has slightly changed with the trees being replaced by hangars.



Below is the editor’s view of his return to Biggin Hill in the airship in what can only be described as a gentleman’s way of flying, one could open the window and wave to the people below, none waved back..? The maximum speed in flight was 50 mph and apart from the hum of the two engines with shrouded propellers was relatively quiet inside.



This airship was able to display lighted signs at night that revolved like a ticker tape. It was a gimmick that never quite made it to the big time. These airships needed a ground crew of about 20 which would proceed ahead

with a couple of trucks which carried mooring towers, which had to be erected in advance of its arrival. This form of transport, as with the old airships had an era of comfort and luxury, which has unfortunately remained somewhat cumbersome to this day.

### RIZON BIGGER AND BIGGER



Two wise men discuss the dimensions and rapid growth of the new hangar on the airfield in the April sunshine. It has been suggested that it could blot out the sun, or even cause an eclipse. Judging by their shadows, it is still an impressive looking building.

### AIRFIELD PERSONALITIES



Mr Premji Patel – ‘PAT’ as he is known in Aviation Circles within the UK. Pat is known from the far north of Scotland to the length and breadth of Southern England. Pat was born in India in 1947. His family moved from India in 1949 for Mombasa, Kenya, where he spent his educational years. Kenya gained its independence in 1963 Pat was 16 at this time. Following the political turmoil that followed,

Pat and his parents moved back to India in 1964. Pat attended College in Bombay from May 1964 to May 1966. He completed his aeronautical engineering course in Kerala (South, India) from 1966 to July 1968. He served his apprenticeship at a Flying School at a place called Baroda (near Bombay). He would leave for the UK in November 1972. January 1973 he joined Field Aircraft Services at Croydon Airport as a licenced engineer. In May 1973 he joined Air Touring Services at Biggin Hill. *An association, which has basically remained, ever since.*

Airtouring in those days were the main agents for SOCATA a division of Aerospatiale, manufacturers of the famous Rallye aircraft, which offered excellent STOL qualities plus a favourable load carrying capacity. Their first hangar was constructed around 1962 and was later modified with parking bays for six aircraft. The adjoining club house



was constructed with a flat roof for a possible floor above as an extension for the flying club. However this never transpired and the hangar became too small as sales of aircraft increased, so too membership to the flying club. Pat gained his first UK engineering licence in 1974. Pat also developed an interest in learning to fly, and on the 13<sup>th</sup> January 76 he took his first lesson with JB. He gained his PPL on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 1977 with Basil Pring, at Dunkeswell. It was during 1976 that Pat decided to branch out on his own and set up 'Pat

Aviation' at Dunkeswell aerodrome as a Rallye Sales and Servicing Company, which would supplement Air Tourings presence in the West Country. 1976 Farnborough Airshow saw a complimentary colour scheme of a Rallye near Concorde.



Pat has always lived in Harrow (North London) and drove to Biggin Hill everyday, starting work two hours before anyone else, but would leave work one hour early so as to beat the dense traffic on the home journey. Whilst at Dunkeswell he stayed in lodgings during the week, driving back to his home at the weekend. A stickler for punishment, Pat still lives in North London. September 1978 saw Pat's return to Air Touring as their Chief Engineer, and is there to this day. Pat's attention to detail is immaculate, he has an articulate memory, and is able to find a numbered file or A/D in an instant, quoting the contents before you have a chance to peruse the document yourself. Air Touring would change hands during the next years, constructing a new hangar beside the original hangar and finally the old hangar would be rebuilt in 2002 to a modern design with enclosed offices. The Rallye aircraft, had by now ceased production, being replaced by the new TB



series, with improved speed, comfort and economy, with special attention to a modern cockpit layout, designed by a leading French car manufacturer.



The new hangar was spacious and warm making for efficient servicing and customer satisfaction. The improved radio facility and navigation equipment offered the latest manufacturing technology.



December 1999 Pat would go to Tarbes for an extended course on the TBM700 series that were top of the range from Aerospatiale. **January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2001** would see another side to Pat, showing him to be a pillar of society, in collecting a fund following the devastating earthquake in India, in Gujarat State, measuring 6.9 – 7.9 on the Richter Scale which devastated a large region including Pat's own village of Sukhpur, where he was born. 100,000 people were reported to have been killed and some 200,000 injured. Pat appeared on TV as a result of his popularity within the community, making a verbal appeal and explaining details of the fund.

Some £3,000,000 was raised and this money was sent to a Temple in India which became the centre for distribution, helping those in immediate distress. Pat, set up a trust for a hospital to be built at his home village of Sukhpur. £100,000 was raised and this trust is ongoing to this day. Pat is a credit to society.